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ABSTRACT

This speech deals with the assumptions and approaches underlying educational assessment and suggests alternatives to standardized testing. It is proposed that the assumption that test items can be standardized is at the base of assessment problems; while there are standard mental functions which children develop, there are no standard items that can measure such development in all children. Most instruments are designed to measure whether or not the respondent has the same information pool, language, and organizational system as the designer of the test. It is proposed that the proper approach to assessment is not to ask "Do you know what I know?" but rather "What is it that you know? Can you speak your native language? How do you organize?" An assessment procedure for Black children that works within their whole historical, traditional, and cultural background is discussed. The interactive nature of any assessment procedure is noted, and it is suggested that assessment should be used for solving specific pedagogical problems rather than for labeling or prediction. (SB)

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Adapting Assessment Procedures: The Black Child

by

Asa G. Hilliard, III

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(American Psychological Association, San Francisco, California, 1977)

(Transcript)

I already know I won't be able to finish, so what I am going to try to do is "tickle the fancy" of researchers, if I can, and hopefully suggest some things to practitioners that may be useful at the same time. Primarily because of my assessment of the state of assessment, I think that almost everything we've done in the area, especially standardized assessment, is premature. The application of assessment technology to some disciplinary areas is yet undeveloped. I can state the case by saying that existing psychometric technique is fuel for a vehicle where the vehicle does not yet exist. It's a theme in search of a movie; the theme is there, but the movie is not. I am talking about a way of re-vamping our thinking about what we ought to be doing in assessment in the first place, even before I can get to the point of dealing with specific populations like the Black child. Let me run through, very quickly a couple of things at the outset to lay the groundwork with assumptions, and then I will try to zero in on what I think ^{that} implies for an approach to assessment. I could, very easily, take the results of research I was able to do under the auspices of the State of California, Department of Education, and develop an "instrument" which I do have, and go out and market that instrument, make a little bit of money like some people do. But, I think it would

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be dishonest of me to do that because all that is suggested by the instrument that was developed is an approach suggesting that much, much more research needs to be done in this area. When I say alternative to standardized testing, the words are not lightly chosen. An alternative to, not an alternative, really a substitute for, if anything, to what has been done under the rubric standardized testing, and I'll tell you why.

I do not see this as an inferior second choice for a population that needs help. I see it as a way of re-vamping what professional psychology ought to be about if we truly are trying to find out what people are about. I don't have the time and I am getting tired of running through examples of racist people who have worked in the name of psychology and standardized testing. I have to mention these again at the beginning. I just want to be sure that no one in this room has failed to read Leon Kamin's Science of Politics of IQ, and I also hope that no one in this room fails to read, before the year is out, Allen Chase's new book, The Legacy of Maltus, the Social Cost of New Scientific Racism. Again, that history is important.

It is important if a man like Raymond B. Cattell says he believes that the, "primitives, including the whole Negro race should be painlessly exterminated".

I think that what he does in testing then becomes important. In other words, we have the right to question the motivations if he takes that kind of racist position. I think the documentation on that is very important. It is not important for me, in 1977, to go back and try to think through those eyes about how people saw the world at that time.

It is important, if we are still stuck with legacies like that, that we as 1977 assessment people take this into account when we look at the origin

of things called "items" that are standardized because much of our discussion assumes that the items are O.K., but what we need are new ways to count, new ways to sequence, new ways to advance - like rearranging the chairs on the Titanic. A word came to me the other day, yesterday in fact, from Marie Berry, a word that I like very much, describing what some of the testing activists were like. We are dealing with "dinosaurs". So, let's get away from that and let's see if I can focus on what the assumptions are that would lead us into the kind of assessment that would free people from their ideas and keep their modesty intact.

The history of cross cultural assessment needs to be taken into account. If I were one of the old time cross cultural assessors, I'd feel embarrassed if I were to look at the track record, when we have had a chance to look back on what was said about people who were strange to them. In other words, whenever people look at the cultures that were strange or different they have always made gross mistakes. You can go back to 1910 when American theological schools were debating as to whether Black people had souls or not! There were some people debating as to whether we could read or not. Whether we were on the scale of human beings or not. In other words, you look back on that and you begin to feel ridiculous. We continue to have that but we cannot wait for some assessors to grow up in their perceptions, so we have to move ahead. I wish I had time to share more with you, but a publication that I have done summarizes this material. I did go into some of the classical failures in cross cultural assessment that do suggest ways to stay out of that rut in the future. Some of these failures, by the way, have not always been Whites

misassessing Blacks, there have been Blacks misassessing Whites. If you know your history, you would know that for seven or eight hundred years the Moors dominated Southern Europe and, at that time, their assessment of Northern Europeans who came to study at Toledo, Seville and other Universities was that they "lacked sharpness of wit, and delicacy of spirit". So they misassessed the White students who were coming to those Universities long before Columbus "discovered" America.

One of the problems that I would like also to mention about standardized assessment is it is not assessment I am concerned about, but the idea that you can standardize. It's what you can standardize that becomes the problem. There are some things you can standardize, but certainly not the items we have on tests. They cannot be standardized because they have different meanings depending on how you use them. We would know that if we paid attention to some data that are right in front of our eyes. But because of the problem that I call "conceptual incarceration," psychologists are committed to the simple system they invented and therefore are not able to get out of the system and look at it critically. What are some of the data that I am talking about that have been overlooked. Pick up the book, Magical Child which has recently come out by Práise and it summarizes some of the data Ainsworth and Geber presented on African babies. One of the things that they found is that all of this technology we have produced, and western medicine and psychology has helped us produce mentally retarded American children! Our children are retarded almost four years behind African children who was raised in the traditional way. When you raise children in a certain way, these children perform physically, and what is

often forgotten in racist psychology, they often perform mentally as much as four to six months in advance of other children in Europe and America. We have known that for twenty years and have not looked at those materials in trying to figure out whether or not our assessment facts and procedures are valid. We've also not looked at UNESCO material and material on how fast people were able to read when certain leaders decided they were going to educate their population. Castro gave the Cuban people one year to get complete literacy. That was twenty years ago and they've had twenty years of literacy since that time; one of the highest literacy rates in the world, taught by children, not by psychologists, not by credentialled teachers, but by little children who had no training. If they can do that with a population which, according to the IQ tests, is supposed to be "deprived", "bilingual", and all of those kinds of things then we might be looking at the tests instead of the children for answers. Looking at Geber's work and Paulo Freire's work on teaching adult peasants to read in thirty hours of time, looking at the work of Project SEED at the University of California in Berkeley which will take any population, Black, White, Yellow, Green, the poor, the rich, and teach them mathematical concepts at the University level, within a space of two weeks time, we have to wonder, "why test?" They succeed because the teaching is good and the assessment is good. Assessment is on-going, interactive, specific. We ought to begin asking questions. Looking at the work of Richard Heber if you want to look at the old tests, that don't mean anything anyway, we can prove, and it has been proven over and over again, that you can push people to pass high on old I.Q. tests. It isn't worth anything if they

can. So at what are we looking? We're looking at both the use of tests and the abuse of tests, but we are also looking inherently at what tests are supposed to be doing. The research we did for the State of California led us to formulate the notion that there are, basically, two kinds of questions that you can ask in assessment. Psychology has asked the first question, "Do you know what I know?" Ninety-nine percent of the assessment procedures in psychology are based on that kind of question. Is your information pool the same as mine? Is the organizational system that you use the same as mine? Is your language the same as mine? And, if I recognize in you things that I recognize in my thing, then I am willing to give to you an assessment of high performance. We think there is a second kind of question, and that is "What is it that you know?" How is it that you speak? How do you organize? This is the type of question psychology is unable to ask because it is stuck with the notion of standardization. If you could give up standardization, you could be free to ask those kinds of questions. While we have been stuck with standardization, other people have not. Interestingly enough, when they have not, they have been able to generate information which is light years ahead of us. We will have to run to catch up. Who are those other people? I mean Cole^{and} Gay in the book on Cultural Context of Thinking and Learning. In Liberia the question was not to ask the children to organize their world the way the children of New York City do, but how do these children organize their world? Of course they do organize their world and they do have a system of complex thinking, of categories, of labeling, just as everyone else in the world does. You have to ask questions, then you have a basis for asking the next question, if someone in that culture is malfunctioning according to that norm. But

if you are stuck with the first question, which is, "Do you know what I know?" you can never know the culture in the first place. Piaget asked that kind of question, a student of Binet. Binet and his followers went down the path of standardization and as a consequence we don't know anything about human development from people who followed that route. On the other hand, Piaget got more interested not in the answers to the questions, but the pattern of attacking the problem, and then was observing people, and as a consequence did produce a psychology of development which may, in fact, rescue standardized assessment from the problem it has right now. I think some of the questions about mental functions that are identified a la Piaget are questions that do form the basis for the possibility of standardization of assessment because you are standardizing at a level that is much deeper than the one we were talking about before. We've been standardizing superficiality like vocabulary which is kind of stupid if you know anything about linguistics at all, but that's another problem. There are two kinds of questions, one and two: One, "do you know what I know?", "What is it that you know?". The "what is it that you know" assumes that you have to use what every human being has in the world, and that is their experience as a vehicle through which they can express the intelligence that they have. That ought to be kind of simple to sensitive people, but it seems like we have a hard time coming around to that. I think that that leads us into the direction of what the alternative has to be in assessment not only for the Blacks and others, but for Whites too because if there is anything that is mis-assessed in America is White children, who also are misassessed because

people are so happy about the "15 point difference" that they can't ask any more questions about White people. Another example of a person who has been able to ask this type of question is Levi-Strauss in his book The Savage Mind. I think the question again is, "How is it that you use your world?" What you find is that people do about the same thing all over the world. Nature has already given the first I.Q. Test and that is, "can you speak your native language?" People all over the world do that at about the age of two, Standardized tests notwithstanding, and language acquisition, as far as I understand it, is infinitely more complex than any task that you will ever write into a Stanford-Binet, Wechsler, or anything else. If people think to learn a language, and we find out later on that they are not ^{thinking,} then the question is not "one of genetic potential but "curriculum induced retardation," and "school induced retardation," "teacher induced retardation," maybe even "psychology induced retardation." I think what we are dealing with is the problem of inability to abstract among psychological assessors.

An example of the inability to abstract is when we mistake form for substance. If you mistake the superficial vocabulary for the deeper more complex morphology of language, then you are unable to abstract and have low I.Q., as I see it. So, what we're after is to get down to the "deep structure" of what people do when they function mentally and to use that concept, if you would, from Chomsky and other people who have worked in linguistics. The same thing goes for anthropology, and there's a parallel to what we would do in psychology. We would then use the unique environment to assess functioning. We would be aware of the fact that the first task

we have to have as psychologists is to link arms with some people ^{who} we really don't talk to. We'd have to link arms with anthropologists and linguists, particularly, because they have been in the habit of observing some things that would help to sharpen the questions that we ask, for example, the question of "world view". World view influences how people organize and use their world. Their belief affects their behavior. Psychologists have not thought much about world views. We also think of "one on one" in one isolated point in time, but there are some very peculiar kinds of conditions. We can't go alone and fix the problem of assessment. We also have to think then not only of world view, but ~~also about~~ ^{the} fact that world view reflects itself in stylistic variations among people. One of the problems with the use of assessment and "cognitive style" right now is that we do compulsively what we always do with anything we find out in assessment. As soon as we find out ^{that} it exists we say, "Hey, that's the way it ought to be, how much can I control, buy, package and sell what I see?" What I see in the use of style is quite different. We simply recognize that a style exists as a consequence of world view, imbedded in world view, imbedded in the way people use the world. It is only a starting point for a person who is either, as a psychologist or a teacher, a problem solver. If you are a problem solver then you must use what you know about world view and cognitive style in order to solve problems, not in order to label people again. We are still looking for labels because that is what we like to do. We like to do prediction in psychology, which is useless. That's good if you are out at the racetrack and your job is a handicapper, but if your job is problem solving your predictive validity might as well

be thrown out the window. You do not need predictive validity unless you happen to believe that your job is to be a gatekeeper in a culture that tries to distribute its goods and services unequally. So, throw predictive validity out the window, because I don't think it's worth a damn! Assessment requires another assumption if you accept what I say about the second type question, that it calls for you to look at world view in order to give meaning to the items that you will ask. In other words that's really what Ernie Bernal was talking about. The item doesn't have the same meaning in Spanish as it does in English; the item doesn't have the same meaning in Spanish as it does in English; the item doesn't have the same meaning in America that it does in Japan; the item doesn't have the same meaning in a family that it has in a school setting. If you are a standardizer you can't deal with that, but that's the way the world is. We have to get off the world in order to keep our system going. If you really want to believe the way the world demands then we have to be able to get a technology that will permit us to do that. So, one of the next things that happens, it seems to me, is that we have to think about assessment now as interaction. That's a new notion. It shouldn't be, but it is. Especially to the psychologist, assessment as an interaction should not be new. For example, we assume in our assessment that the psychologist is always standard. He or she is unchangeable; we are a standard treatment. We give our tests, Stanford-Binet, Weschler, or group test which allow people to display to us what they can do in their varying fashions. If we didn't believe that we were "standard," we would keep them some information about the person who is doing the assessment. For example, we might even keep the IQ of the psychologist and report it simultaneously with that of

the person who is being tested. We might keep the socio-economic status of the psychologist and report that simultaneously with the socio-economic status of the person being assessed. As a matter of fact there is justification for this experimentally. Bernal has already suggested that a child's performance can vary sometimes as a consequence of seven or eight things. One of them which was "similarity in ethnicity between the examiner and examinee". Wouldn't that be important, if we really understood assessment as an interaction, to keep that kind of information together.

I don't know where that leads and I am not trying to suggest that people can't learn to deal cross-culturally, as a matter of fact just the opposite. Some of the best cross-cultural people I know are people who used to be strangers to the culture that they have not become very good at observing. For example, Janheinz Jahn in his book Muntu, I think, displays as good an understanding of the whole African theme and the African world as any one else. As a matter of fact, cross-cultural assessment always tightens the academic rigor of assessment. We don't have much rigor; we have statistical rigor, but not academic rigor in standardized assessment.

I think that the thing we have to do if we are to fix the problem is to deal with the issue of the utility of assessment. For example, most of the discussion, even some of the discussion that we have had here today is about fixing a procedure to be fair as a procedure but does not suggest a valid connection between the procedure and the pedagogy. In other words, if individual mental testing is to be "diagnostic" for a school situation then there ought to be some kind of treatment or practice that is dictated

out of the assessment. There is not. For example, there is no standard practice in gifted programs or in programs for the retarded. They are indistinguishable. What teachers do in one program is indistinguishable from what they do in another, and yet we go along with the myth that we are diagnosing to place kids in a place where they can "get the treatment they need". The treatment they need only means that if he is retarded then he can sit in a class with other people who we think are retarded. That doesn't suggest anything about pedagogy. I defy anyone to show me a unique pedagogy from participant observation. So, we have to deal with that! We have to give up the notion of "norm" because the notion of norm comes from an egocentric world view. It comes from a world view that the only standard of behavior is a European or some other standard of behavior. Then you begin to confuse "standardization" with "standards". That's the reason we are having so much trouble right now with standardized tests. If a child scores high on a standardized test, the SAT or something else, then the school who takes the highest scoring child obviously is the "high standard" school. If the school takes low scores on the SAT, they must be a school of low standards. Standardization and standards are not the same thing, but we in our minds are so conceptually incarcerated we can't see the difference. White behavior is not universal behavior, nor is any other behavior. Prediction isn't worth anything.

What does the correction require? I think, very briefly, it requires these kinds of things. First, I think that if we are intending to assess, we have to have some mental function that we are describing. Let me give you an illustration, and I don't have time except for this one. If, as Piaget suggests, there is something called "object permanence" that may

be the "standardized" thing that you are looking for. Here is a person at a point in his development where he is able to do object permanence, to do that exercise which shows object permanence. O.K., if that is the standard function, that doesn't mean that a standard question will tell you whether they can do that or not. For example, you don't care whether they demonstrate that by playing peek-a-boo, or whether they demonstrate that by having someone show to you they understand when someone steps outside the door and turns around the corner that they are still there, or whether you hold up your hand and put a quarter behind it and have the person let you know that that is still there. Those are three different items, none of which are standard, but the function of object permanence is standard. Now the inability to deal with standardizing mental functions is the thing that has us partly into this problem. The next thing is, ~~that I~~ don't know what difference it makes anyway unless you have a curriculum that demands your use of the knowledge of object permanence. You see, that is why people are going backward on assessment right now, which means that as soon as you discover that object permanence is one of the mental tasks that can be observed in our children, then we believe that now the curriculum goal is that we are supposed to produce object permanence earlier than it normally occurs. Produce maturation? Good God!

That is the origin of curriculum! It is our *discovery* of certain things that come about in assessment, which is backwards. In other words, what ought to happen is that we ought to know that, if you have tasks that require object permanence at an age where it does not occur, then you change your curriculum to harmonize with what that person is doing.

That's where the assessment ought to be coming in.

I can't really get into the Black child because so many things would have to precede my statement about that, but I can suggest a couple of things *to consider*. You have to be dealing with a holistic data base. That is to say, not the stuff that we are generally limited to, what we've been asking questions about as psychologists. In other words, what is your I.Q. score? What is your home and family background? Most of us do not have the background to ask those questions, because we think all home and family backgrounds are the same as those with which we grew up. So when we see a new home and family background, we don't know the historical material on the community, we don't know the social material on the community, we don't know the political material on the community, and we don't even have a pedagogical way of using that material even if we knew. So, asking those questions is almost useless for practice. I believe that we also have to give up the notion of poverty environments as being cognitively deprived environments. That's another thing we are mentally stuck with. No one has yet proven to me that all the mental functions that go on at the University of California don't go on in any poverty environment. What happens is that it doesn't go on with the material that is used in the University. There's that inability to abstract again. The abstraction would be that the mental function is there, no matter what the material is that it is being used on. The inability to abstract is to say, "I can only recognize it if they answer questions *if the respondent uses material which is familiar to me.*"

What did we do? O.K., what we tried to do was to identify skilled clinicians who work full time with Black children. Based upon the work of these skilled clinicians, we interrogated them about the kinds of themes that they picked up in working with Black children. We also paid attention to the whole Africanity of Black children, which is the whole historical tradition and culture from which Black children come. Recognizing that not all Black children are as close to the African tradition as they used to be, and also recognizing that something else happens once you have been in America for 400 years. But what we did find was that there are, as Wade Nobles has found, significant African retentions that help to explain why African children continue to do some of the things that they do, as well as the adaptations that have been made at this point. Without that perspective it's impossible even to know which questions to ask about "what is it that you know". After we did that, we stole David Shapiro's thing on Neurotic Styles. We found that it fit very closely with what a number of people who were skilled observers had been seeing when they looked at all populations. He talks about "hysterical" styles and he talks about "obsessive-compulsive" styles. We found that Rosalie Cohen talks about an "analytic style" and a "relational style", which basically parallels Shapiro. We found that Ornstein in his work on the "Left Brain and Right Brain" was talking basically about the same thing. We found that Castaneda and Ramirez in their book Cultural Democracy, Bicognitive Development and Education was basically talking about the same thing. We found that Luther X in describing the Black child was also describing one of those styles. We found that Warren Tenhouten, anthropologist, was

also talking about the same thing in Science and its Mirror Image.

In other words, we find that when people are looking at behavior all the time in clinical settings and when they describe what they see, even though the language that they use is different, they generally tend to describe modalities that are generic across human groups. Some of those modalities tend to occur more with some groups than with others so that if I were to describe to you what some of those styles were, for either one of those polar opposites, you would recognize in them a description of general characteristics of certain cultural populations. Now don't do like most psychologists who are mostly "obsessive compulsives" do. That is, as soon as you hear a label you say, "well, that's what that child is". It is important for compulsives to label to deal with things as if they are unchangeable. In fact, most people have both modalities built into them, choose to emphasize one or the other, and can expand their thinking and style to include either one or the other. These are the kinds of pieces of information that assessors in psychology ought to be using. They ought to be finding out how to harmonize the style of the individual child, with the individual teacher. They ought to be able to analyze the school environment, because school environment's also display a modal style; most of them obsessive compulsive. They ought to be able, through these analyses, to provide feedback to people who function in these environments in ways that will enable them to use that environment much more effectively. I do not have the time to describe the style. I do not have time to describe the instrument. I would not even, as I said, try to sell my instruments to you although I think it is better than 99% of

the ones that are on the market. But I do hope I have suggested something in the way of an approach to assessment which will take into account, not only the reality of what Afro-American or Black child is like, but what any child is like, if we were honest and really creative observers.